

## CHAPTER 8

# What We Have Learned About Teacher Education to Improve Literacy Achievement in Urban Schools

*Kathryn H. Au*

University of Hawaii

*Taffy E. Raphael*

*Kathleen C. Mooney*

University of Illinois at Chicago

Urban schools are beehives of activity, abuzz with programs, initiatives, and assessment systems, coping with one new mandate after another. Much of this activity is directed toward a single goal: raising scores on state tests. While we decry the overemphasis on test scores, we do not deny the reality that the literacy achievement of students in urban schools continues to lag behind that of their mainstream peers. In fact, by grade 12, many students in urban schools are reading at a level similar to that of typical mainstream students in grade 8 (Grigg, Daane, Jin, & Campbell, 2003). It is fitting, then, that teacher educators seek to join educators working in urban schools in the quest to improve students' literacy achievement.

What can we do to make such collaborations successful? As implied above, one of the ways to build successful school–university collaborations is to organize them around the goal of improving students' literacy achievement. When the school and university partners direct their efforts toward this shared goal, professional development assistance provided by the university partner becomes central to the mission of the urban school.

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## Purposes of This Chapter

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In this chapter, we share the lessons we have learned about how teacher education can be organized to help urban schools improve their students' literacy achievement. Our insight comes from working with urban schools through an approach called the Standards Based Change (SBC) Process (Au, 2005; Au, Raphael, & Mooney, in press; Raphael, Goldman, Au, & Hirata, 2006), a systematic school improvement framework that leads to improved literacy achievement. Our view builds on and extends the concept of professional development schools, institutions based on partnerships between teacher education programs and P–12 schools that focus on increasing student achievement (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2001).

We begin by discussing the roots of the SBC Process in Hawaii and its scaling up to schools in Chicago, as well as the underlying principles of social constructivism that have framed our work. Our research suggests that schools that succeed in improving student achievement through their work with the SBC Process move through a seven-level developmental model. To facilitate schools' progress through the levels, we have designed four school-based teacher education courses taught through a combination of whole-school workshops and small-group coaching sessions at specific grade levels or for members of specific departments. The four courses, each of which is discussed in detail, focus on (1) the professional learning community and a system for improving student achievement, (2) student learning, (3) curriculum guides, and (4) portfolio assessment. Finally, we describe how we have reinforced our work with the SBC Process at the school level by making connections to a master's degree program in literacy.

## Review of Research and Theory

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The work in urban teacher education we describe grows from research on the SBC Process, which was developed in schools in Hawaii beginning in 1997 (Au, 2005). In 2002, the SBC Process was scaled to Chicago as the basis for the work of Partnership READ, a project directed by Taffy Raphael at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), with funding from the Searle Funds of the Chicago Community Trust. While the SBC Process had been used in a wide range of schools in Hawaii, it had not been tested in an urban environment comparable to that of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). The school systems are

markedly different. The average poverty level in public schools in Hawaii, for example, is approximately 50%. That compares to a poverty rate of approximately 85% among public schools in Chicago. Results of a hierarchical linear modeling analysis showed that students in Hawaii Title I schools following the SBC Process had significantly higher test scores on the state reading test than did students in Title I schools not following this approach (Au, 2005). Similar growth was seen in Chicago schools that stayed with the process for five years (Destefano, 2007; Mooney & Raphael, 2006).

When observations made in the Chicago schools were combined with those made in the Hawaii schools, the results led to a developmental model of school change with the following seven levels (Raphael, Goldman, et al., 2006):

1. Recognizing a need—An individual or small group recognizes the need to pull the school together to improve students' literacy achievement.
2. Organizing for change—A core group of leaders focuses professional development efforts on literacy and adjusts the school's schedule to give teachers time to work together.
3. Working on the building blocks—The school's university (or other external) partner introduces the SBC Process as a means of pulling the school together as a professional learning community and guides teachers to identify the school's philosophy and vision of the excellent reader or writer.
4. Moving as a whole school—The external partner supports the schoolwide professional learning community by helping teachers develop grade-level benchmarks (end-of-year outcomes) in literacy and a rubric-based assessment system to monitor student progress.
5. Establishing the system—The external partner sets up opportunities for teachers to participate in schoolwide conversations at the beginning, middle, and end of the year in which they share assessment results and talk together about how they are using standards to improve students' literacy achievement.
6. Implementing the staircase curriculum—Teachers create literacy curriculum guides that define *progress* at each grade level in terms of "steps" on a coherent "staircase" curriculum; completed guides are shared with everyone in the school.

7. Fully engaging students and families—Teachers, through portfolio assessment, engage students in self-assessment, goal setting, and three-way conferences (Davies, Cameron, Politano, & Gregory, 1992) as a way of expanding the learning community to include students and their families.

Schools in Hawaii generally saw gains in literacy achievement when they reached Level 6. In Chicago, some schools saw gains as early as Level 5, although teachers did not necessarily experience ownership over the change effort at that level.

When we work with schools at Levels 1 and 2, we focus on helping them create the infrastructure needed to support a schoolwide professional learning community. Once a solid infrastructure is in place, we provide the school with four teacher education courses based on the levels in the developmental model. The first course guides teachers at a school through Levels 3 and 4, the second takes them through Level 5, the third through Level 6, and the fourth through Level 7. Descriptions of each of the four courses appear later in this chapter. In each course, we seek to build teachers' knowledge of literacy, literacy instruction, and literacy assessment as well as their ability to be effective change agents who support efforts to refine the staircase curriculum and promote literacy achievement.

Social constructivist theory, particularly the work of Vygotsky (see Gavelek & Bresnahan, *in press*), has led to many insights about learning, particularly with respect to students' literacy learning in classrooms (e.g., Au & Mason, 1981; Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995; Palincsar & Brown, 1984). We have conceptualized the SBC Process as a social constructivist approach to school literacy improvement, building on parallels between the learning of students and teachers.

The first parallel stems from Vygotsky's (1978) assertion that learning begins on the social plane, in interactions with a more knowledgeable other. Just as students learn reading through participation in a community of readers with the assistance of teacher and peers, we suggest that teachers learn to teach effectively through participation in a professional learning community, where the facilitator may be a university professor or other external partner. The facilitator brings an outsider's perspective, along with knowledge of research on literacy and school change, and can facilitate the exchange of professional knowledge and practical experiences among teachers in a school.

A second parallel is found in the embodied nature of experience, recognizing the limitations of “book learning.” Just as students develop proficiency in literacy by engaging in activity settings with authentic purposes for reading and writing, teachers develop proficiency in improving their students’ literacy achievement by working within authentic activity settings in their own schools—or within close approximations to such settings. We have found that teachers’ introduction to and participation in the SBC Process is most effective when conducted within the school setting and with the entire faculty. Alternatively, when teachers from different schools enroll in graduate course work to improve their literacy instruction, we establish activity settings that allow them to participate as members of a virtual school. Regardless of the setting, our sessions include time for teachers to work together to improve their practice. Typically, while teachers in urban settings may learn the content needed for effective instruction, this content is seldom embodied in the practices needed to actually implement and sustain high-quality practice. We fill this gap by preparing teachers to become change agents in their schools through the teaching they model in their own classrooms and through their work as part of their school’s professional learning community.

A third parallel is found in the importance of ownership: students’ ownership of literacy and teachers’ ownership of literacy improvement efforts. Au (1997) defines *ownership* in terms of students valuing literacy so much that they will use reading and writing for purposes they set for themselves, in home and community settings as well as at school. Au argues that ownership of literacy, rather than just proficiency, should be the overarching goal of literacy instruction in urban and other schools with high proportions of students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This argument will resonate with many educators in urban settings, who often report that students appear to lack the motivation to become excellent readers and writers.

Likewise, curriculum leaders cite teachers’ lack of ownership over literacy improvement efforts as a chief barrier to change efforts in their schools. The standards movement began in the 1980s, and many veteran teachers have grown weary of mandate after mandate demanding that they address standards and raise test scores. This weariness is understandable given that most teachers have never received adequate support, which we believe must come in the form of systematic professional development and extensive time to work with colleagues. Urban teachers rarely have the opportunity to gain a deep understanding of higher

standards for student achievement, to work out the implications for changes in their practice, or to receive feedback related to continued improvements in practice. When teachers, such as those working in SBC Process schools, do get this opportunity, they feel ownership over literacy improvement efforts. A high degree of teacher ownership lays the foundation for sustainability of the improvement effort over a period of years.

The final parallel is related to the importance of a well-planned curriculum in which learning experiences occur within what Vygotsky (1978) called the zone of proximal development, the region of sensitivity to instruction. In the classroom, students are guided through increasingly challenging experiences that they are able to address successfully because they can draw on what has come before. Similarly, in SBC Process schools, we created a series of four courses, each building on the previous one, to help teachers take on increasingly challenging tasks related to schoolwide literacy improvement. Teachers are guided through these courses, which are designed to help them create and implement a coherent, or staircase, literacy curriculum for students across the grades.

## Best Practices

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Schools in Chicago, like many of their urban counterparts, often adopt comprehensive reform models such as Success for All (Slavin & Madden, 2001) or other packaged programs in an effort to improve students' literacy achievement. On some occasions, these adoptions occur at the district level, as evidenced by the CPS's 2007 Core Program Initiative, in which schools were asked to select one of three basal reading programs to guide their literacy instruction and assessment. While such programs may provide an appropriate starting point for school literacy improvement, we find that preset programs foster a tendency for schools to downplay reflective practice and to promote teaching that overemphasizes lower-level skills. This situation raises issues of equity, as preset programs overemphasizing basic skills are most often adopted by schools serving high proportions of students of diverse backgrounds, thus moving teachers away from reflective practice and students away from higher-level thinking (Au, 2006). Lack of reflective practice by teachers is an equity issue because teachers who are not encouraged to think for themselves are less likely to be prepared to teach students to think for themselves.

In the SBC Process, we distinguish between a program and a curriculum. We define *curriculum* as all the materials and experiences—both instructional and assessment-related—that teachers use to help their students achieve high standards. Teachers use the SBC Process to develop their own effective literacy curricula. Rather than relying on materials or lesson plans dictated by preset programs, they choose the best materials available from a variety of sources and determine exactly which instructional activities they will use in the classroom. Teachers who develop a curriculum through the SBC Process understand it deeply, are committed to its implementation, and realize that the curriculum is never finished. Rather, it is in a state of continual refinement (Au, 2005).

Our goal when we work with urban schools in the SBC Process is to support teachers in creating what we call their school's own staircase curriculum (the same concept as curriculum coherence, espoused by Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001). The staircase curriculum, which is based on benchmarks carefully coordinated across grade levels, is broader than any preset reading or writing program. We work with the reading or writing programs already in place in a school, inviting teachers to build on the strengths of these programs while correcting the weaknesses. Obviously, if we want teachers in urban schools to be creators and not just receivers of curriculum, we must be committed to involving them in a multiyear process of systematic professional development, a process that not only allows them to become familiar with current research on literacy but also values their knowledge of their students and the community.

The results of the research have guided our work with urban schools and provided the outline of a teacher education curriculum for those teaching in such settings. This research-based curriculum, designed to promote school change, is made up of a series of four year-long, on-site courses in literacy. In fact, four years is a good estimate of the time it is likely to take a typical urban school to achieve sustainable success, though evidence of student gains in achievement typically emerges within approximately two years. We depart from the way typical on-site courses operate in our insistence that professional development in the SBC Process involve all teachers, not just volunteers (for details, see Au, 2005). Each course centers on teachers working together on specific tasks related to improving students' literacy achievement, and a new course is introduced only when teachers have successfully completed the previous one. Our experience suggests that a school needs to provide teachers with *the equivalent of* eight full days (a combination of

half-day inservice days, professional development days, grade-level meeting time, etc.) to participate in each of these year-long courses; curriculum leaders tell us that most teachers devote many additional hours on their own.

## Supporting Best Practices

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### ***Course #1: Professional Learning Community and System for Improving Student Achievement***

In the first course we often begin by helping the teachers in an urban school to come together as a professional learning community (DuFour, 2004). This course centers on a To-Do List that is integral to the SBC Process. Although the first two items on the list are relatively straightforward issues, they address areas teachers typically have not explicitly considered for many years. The items call for discussing beliefs about teaching, learning, and literacy and creating a vision statement describing the excellent reader or writer who will graduate from the school. Professional development focuses on knowledge building about literacy and in particular on current research related to reading and writing (Farstrup & Samuels, 2002) and national expectations for students' literacy performance as inferred from the current framework of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Donahue, Daane, & Jin, 2003). Teachers work in grade-level or content area teams or create vertical teams as they explore these issues.

A CPS literacy coordinator who works at Reid Elementary (pseudonym) described her school's experience with the beginning phase of Partnership READ, the UIC project based on the SBC Process, as follows:

In our first year, we met as a faculty in August before the students began classes. After being introduced to the SBC Process and Partnership READ's To-Do List, we worked on our philosophy. The faculty broke into teams to discuss and record their philosophy of what a good literacy program would look like. We then came together and reported out on our philosophy of literacy and found commonalities. From this we worked on a vision statement. A committee took the rough draft created as a whole group and worked to make it clear and concise. A few versions were then shared with the staff and one was chosen. (interview with literacy coordinator, May 20, 2005)



At Drake Elementary School, teachers began the school year by forming four teacher teams that included teachers across K–8 grade levels and curricular areas. Each team generated a list of concepts that characterized their beliefs about teaching (e.g., the importance of “being clear on objectives” and “differentiated learning”), learning (e.g., “connecting to prior knowledge and extending it” and “every child can learn”), and literacy (e.g., components of the Chicago Reading Initiative—comprehension, word study, writing, fluency and “reading for meaning”).

After the philosophy and vision statements have been drafted, grade-level teams tackle the next two items on the list: creating grade-level benchmarks that support the vision of the excellent reader or writer and “I Can” statements (rewordings of each of the benchmarks in student-friendly language). Teachers check their benchmarks and “I Cans” against state standards and bring their work into alignment.

Grade-level discussions are often intense and thoughtful. We find it critical for teachers to draft their own grade-level benchmarks rather than simply selecting state or district benchmarks from a list. Benchmarks form the foundation for both instruction and assessment in the SBC Process. Our experience suggests that teachers will neither feel ownership over nor have deep understanding of benchmarks prepared by others. We have encountered teachers who refused to develop their own benchmarks. These teachers made slower progress when it came to understanding both the SBC Process and standards-based education and had more difficulty mastering instruction and assessment strategies that promoted students’ higher-level thinking abilities and literacy achievement than those who did prepare their own benchmarks.

Once the benchmarks are in place, we focus on the remaining key elements in the SBC Process To-Do List, which was developed in Hawaii and used by Partnership READ in scaling up the SBC Process for use in Chicago schools. The elements in the To-Do List are as follows:

- Identifying the evidence needed to determine how well students are meeting the established year-end benchmarks
- Constructing a system for collecting this evidence at the beginning, middle, and end of the year
- Creating and refining rubrics for evaluating the evidence and for assessing inter-rater reliability
- Analyzing student work
- Designing instructional improvements

In short, this first course provides teachers with grounding in standards-based instruction and assessment in literacy and stresses the importance of coherence across grades and school subjects in a staircase curriculum.

## ***Course #2: Focus on Student Learning***

By the time teachers at a school have completed the To-Do List, they have come together as a professional learning community and put in place a rudimentary system for improving student achievement through standards. However, teachers have typically focused their work within grade levels and have spent little time coordinating their benchmarks and assessments across grade levels. In other words, grade levels have created their own steps but have not explored how well the steps come together to form a “staircase.” This is why we focus closely on student learning in the second course and use teachers’ observations about student progress to promote development of the staircase curriculum.

The task we present to the teachers is that of establishing a system for three-times-per-year reporting of results: pretest, midyear check, and posttest. We ask teachers to administer assessments measuring students’ progress toward meeting grade-level benchmarks during three evidence windows set by the school, typically periods of a week or two weeks. We facilitate sessions during which teachers meet in grade levels to score the assessment evidence collected, refining their rubrics if necessary and checking for reliability. We guide teachers to discuss the results obtained; create bar graphs showing the percentage of students meeting, exceeding, or working on the benchmarks; identify strengths and weaknesses in students’ performance; and design instructional improvements.

Information presented in this course centers on two areas. The first is assessment. Basics of assessment—such as the difference between formative and summative assessment, the advantages of performance assessment, the role of large-scale state and standardized tests—are all addressed. Exploring such topics in the context of examples from one’s own school, district, and state makes lessons real to teachers. We teach about rubrics, including distinctions between task-specific and generalizable, holistic, and analytic. Because teachers are working on refining rubrics of their own, they can immediately apply what they learn to real-life situations.

After the second year of work with the SBC Process in Chicago, both the teachers and literacy coordinators working at Partnership

READ schools became aware of their need for a deeper understanding of assessment. In response, UIC faculty members developed a summer assessment course for the literacy coordinators, with the expectation that they would subsequently share the course content and processes with faculty members at their schools. The four-week course, specifically crafted for literacy coordinators at schools that were participating in the SBC Process, focused on several aspects of assessment:

- Various forms of assessment
- Relative quality of assessment instruments
- Alignment of instructional goals with assessment methods
- Design of standards-based literacy assessments

Feedback subsequent to the course suggested that this focused study of assessment empowered the literacy coordinators to better teach and support their teachers in classroom-based assessment work. The course also enabled the literacy coordinators to become critical consumers of assessment and led to extended, on-site professional development courses in assessment at several of the Partnership READ schools the following year.

The second topic covered in this course is instruction aimed at higher-level thinking in literacy. For example, at Shields School in Chicago, teachers had adopted Question–Answer Relationships (QAR; Raphael, Highfield, & Au, 2006) as a schoolwide framework for comprehension instruction, but they continued to have difficulty making connections between the instructional strategies they used to teach comprehension skills and comprehension assessment results. In response, Partnership READ staff members worked collaboratively with the two literacy coordinators at Shields during the second semester of one school year, designing a series of professional development workshops aimed at supporting evidence-based comprehension instruction. The workshops featured activities on the purposes of different forms of comprehension assessment, analysis by grade-level teams of the content and results of the comprehension assessments teachers had administered in their classrooms, and modeling of instructional strategies related to these assessment results. These whole-school workshops were followed by Partnership READ staff members' participation in grade-level team meetings, arranged to support the teachers' application of the professional development information and processes.

When it comes to sharing their assessment results, we guide teachers in reaching agreement on the approach they will follow. We draw on the concept from the arts known as a “gallery walk,” in which artists’ products are displayed for the public. A gallery walk in the SBC Process takes place three times a year and consists of

- The schoolwide reporting, by grade levels, of students’ achievement levels on classroom-based assessments along with information on how the teachers plan to respond instructionally to what they have learned from these assessments
- Schoolwide reflection activities on both the grade-level benchmarks and “I Can” statements and on the related assessment system as it reflects progress in constructing a staircase curriculum
- Individual teachers’ reflections on what they and their grade-level peers need to do in response to the schoolwide sharing session and the information that has emerged from the discussions
- An opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the hard work that has gone into the gallery walk

We provide teachers with templates for their presentations while encouraging them to experiment with formats that will allow them to communicate their findings effectively. We guide teachers in how to provide constructive feedback to teachers at other grade levels following presentations. We promote the building of a staircase curriculum by asking teachers to make observations about what the presentations as a whole indicate about continuities and discontinuities in benchmarks, assessment, and instruction across the grade levels, a move that contributes to their vision of the excellent reader or writer. Because experienced teachers will participate in many gallery walks over time, we find it important to vary the format of the gallery walk—for example, in the ways teachers share their results or give feedback to others—so that the event does not lose its power to foster change.

Whole-school discussion of student learning has proven to be a particularly powerful tool for promoting teacher and school change, whether schools are just beginning their work with the SBC Process or are veterans of several years. In the second year of the SBC Process at Reid School, teachers’ reflections following their grade-level presentations revealed a trend related to word study that appeared to exist throughout the grade levels. Teachers used the gallery walk conversations as the impetus for identifying word study as an important school-

wide focus. They also agreed on the need to align instruction in this area across grade levels. A middle school language arts teacher kicked off this part of the discussion, stating,

I notice a trend of word knowledge and vocabulary needs throughout the grades. In third grade, they talked about vocabulary in context; in second grade, they talked about word calling; in the upper grades, the needs are the same. This seems to be a trend in every grade that affects our [students' reading] comprehension. Because of a lack of advanced vocabulary, our kids are behind.... This is especially true in the content areas; reading is very difficult if you don't have this.

A second-grade teacher added that it was important to connect students' home and school languages—that it was solely a matter of teaching vocabulary. A middle school math teacher noted that vocabulary knowledge was fundamental to both fluency and comprehension and raised this question about the alignment in the “I Can” statements:

We seem weak, as a whole, in fluency and vocabulary in context—and vocabulary connects directly to comprehension. We need to emphasize prefixes and suffixes in content vocabulary.... The gaps might be in the “I Can” statements. Maybe there are some disconnects there.

And the assistant principal reinforced the importance of alignment: “We’ve done a lot of grade-level planning, but we need to look at vertical alignment so that teachers across grades are talking to each other” (field notes, January 28, 2005). As a result of this particular gallery walk and discussion, Reid School faculty members identified vocabulary as their school’s greatest need; it became a primary focus area for that year’s SBC Process work. The importance of these three-times-per-year schoolwide reports is reflected in the literacy coordinator’s comments about their impact on development of the staircase curriculum at Reid School. She characterized her school’s experience as follows:

Our focus on vocabulary did come directly from our discussion following the fall gallery walk [schoolwide reports by each grade level]. Word knowledge “I Cans” and assessments were so different across the school. Some grades looked at word knowledge as reading a list of words while others looked at word analysis or the use of context clues.... After the gallery walk, grade levels were expected to revisit their “I Cans,” to either add additional “I Cans” to address vocabulary or redo their existing ones. Of course, this meant changing assessments and instruction. So this gallery walk discussion generated

a lot of work for all the grades. But it came directly from teacher observations of grade-level presentations. (personal communication, May 27, 2007)

### ***Course #3: Curriculum Guides***

Once teachers at a school have made three-times-per-year reporting of results a routine, we can be quite certain that they are engaging in schoolwide conversations about what everyone is doing to improve students' literacy achievement through standards. As a result of these conversations across—as well as within—grade levels, a staircase curriculum gradually begins to come together. At this point we introduce alignment activities in which teachers make observations about continuities or discontinuities between the benchmarks developed by their peers at different grade levels.

Once the teachers have had the opportunity to align and fine-tune their benchmarks, they are ready to begin creating their grade-level curriculum guides. When this chapter was written, most Chicago schools had not worked with the SBC Process long enough for teachers to have begun working on their curriculum guides. However, teachers in more than a dozen SBC Process schools in Hawaii had been involved in curriculum development efforts on a smaller scale, having worked on author study or genre units for their grade level. Most had not attempted to create a year-long curriculum in reading or writing, but they were well prepared to tackle this challenge because of the work they had completed in the first two courses.

In the third course, we build on this foundation by using Tyler's (1949) classic work on curriculum as a structure for the guides. Tyler suggests that a curriculum has four necessary components:

1. Goals for student learning
2. Instructional strategies
3. Instructional materials
4. Assessment

We tell teachers that we will guide them through the process of creating curriculum guides based on Tyler's model. Teachers are pleasantly surprised to learn that through their work with the SBC Process To-Do List they have already created many products that can go directly into their curriculum guides. Their grade-level benchmarks and "I Can" statements, aligned to state standards, address the section on goals. Furthermore, they

have completed the section on assessment by writing procedures for collecting evidence, developing rubrics, and selecting anchor papers (exemplars of student work at a given level of performance).

Components 2 and 3 of Tyler's (1949) list, dealing with instructional strategies and instructional materials, often require considerable effort for teachers to assemble. Examples of instructional strategies include (a) QARs, a way to help students answer questions based on a specific text; (b) thematic units such as those for author studies; or (c) minilessons designed to teach particular concepts such as the sequence of events. Instructional materials are items that may be intended for student use, such as short texts to be read to or by students, forms for concept maps, and peer editing checklists. They may also be references for teachers, such as an article providing guidelines for conducting literature discussions or a list of phonics skills and spelling patterns typically taught at a particular grade level.

Experienced teachers usually have access to a wide array of resources related to instructional strategies and materials, scattered among professional books, file folders, binders, teachers' guides, and the like. We encourage teachers to gather these resources together in one place and to match resources to their grade-level benchmarks. Teachers can then engage in discussions to determine the specific resources they want to use to help their students meet or exceed grade-level benchmarks. These resources are placed into master curriculum guide binders for each grade level. All teachers receive copies of the relevant pages in the master curriculum guide, which they then use as the basis for their customized, individual curriculum guides. For example, all teachers at grade 3 may have agreed on a list of read-aloud books to use in teaching students how authors engage in character development. However, individual teachers may choose to supplement this list with their personal favorites.

At the time this chapter was written, teachers at 13 schools in Hawaii had completed curriculum guides in reading and writing. In most Hawaii schools, the process of developing good drafts of the curriculum guides has taken teachers about a year. When teachers have their drafts ready, a carousel is held in the school library. Each grade level is assigned a table, on which the teachers place their curriculum guides. In the span of about an hour, groups of grade-level teachers rotate among the tables, looking at the guides their peers in other grade levels have created. When all teachers have reviewed all the guides, teachers discuss their observations with their grade levels: what they

have learned about what other grade levels are doing, implications for improvements to their own curriculum guides, and where their school seems to be in terms of building a staircase curriculum. At this point, teachers understand that the process of curriculum writing is never really finished, although changes in the future are likely to be refinements rather than complete overhauls.

A teacher at Holomua Elementary School in Hawaii explained the benefits of working with the SBC Process and creating a curriculum guide in the following way:

I have no fear when it comes to curriculum. I've been through the process. I created a curriculum from scratch. It's not just that we went through the process, but [rather that] what we ended up with was such a good product that we could really use and that we could really see growth in our students. (Hokutan, 2005, p. 24)

Teachers in Hawaii report that they use their guides on a daily basis because they built the guides with the resources they know they need to teach reading or writing effectively. Guides can often be found open on teachers' desks, and teachers can be seen pulling pages out of the guides. Schools provide time periodically for teachers to revise and update their guides, particularly when new teachers arrive at a grade level. The use of curriculum guides in Chicago is discussed later in this chapter in the context of UIC's master's degree in literacy program.

### ***Course #4: Portfolio Assessment***

By the time teachers have completed the third course and have their curriculum guides in hand, they have gained a deep understanding of their grade level's curriculum in reading or writing and they are familiar with the staircase curriculum that extends across the grades. Because the curriculum has become transparent to the teachers, they are now in a position to make the curriculum transparent to their students. This is the reason that we make portfolio assessment—which includes student self-assessment, goal setting, and three-way conferences (Davies et al., 1992)—the subject of the fourth course.

We have introduced portfolio assessment in the context of the SBC Process to five schools in Hawaii. (As of this writing, Chicago schools had not worked with the SBC Process long enough to implement portfolios.) At each of these schools, some teachers were using the process in their classrooms, and almost all had attempted to use it at some point. Many, however, were doing so with limited success. Our ex-



perience indicates that unless they have taken a graduate course on literacy assessment, teachers have not had the opportunity to gain a conceptual understanding of portfolio assessment. Therefore we begin by providing teachers with an intellectual framework for identifying the purpose of portfolio assessment and the specific portfolio model that will help them accomplish that purpose. The basis for this framework is Valencia's (1998) outline of six portfolio models: (1) the showcase model, which highlights students' best efforts; (2) the progress model, which shows an individual student's growth over time; (3) the process model, which presents a student's work in different phases of a process, such as the writing or inquiry process; (4) the ownership model, which features evidence of the student's identity as a reader and writer; (5) the evaluation model, which shows evidence of a student's performance evaluated against an external standard; and (6) the composite model, which is a combination of two or more of the other models. In deciding among models, Valencia emphasizes, teachers must think of both the purpose of and audience for the portfolios.

In SBC Process schools, we explain to teachers that they have a ready-made basis for evaluation portfolios, provided by the evidence of student performance they have been collecting three times per year to determine progress toward meeting grade-level benchmarks. We suggest that teachers work together in grade levels to determine whether an evaluation portfolio will suffice or whether they want to create a composite portfolio that addresses an additional aspect of assessment. To date, teachers at all grade levels at all schools have opted to design composite portfolios. The vast majority has decided on composite portfolios with an evaluation component plus a progress component. Teachers indicate that the progress component is valuable in providing evidence of growth even when students are not meeting grade-level standards. Some kindergarten teachers have chosen to include a showcase component, reasoning that children and parents enjoy having a record of the best work produced that year, including drawings and CDs of children reading aloud. Because they wanted to improve students' attitudes toward literacy, some upper-grade teachers have chosen to include an ownership component.

It is an extremely challenging task for teachers to work out all the details of a portfolio assessment system and successfully implement that system in an ongoing manner. Most teachers have had the experience of starting the process in the fall only to see it languish as the school year proceeds. The fourth course in the SBC Process helps teachers come

to understand the reasons behind portfolios and gain clarity about what they need to do to make portfolios a part of the everyday process of teaching and learning. Many products that teachers have previously developed become part of the process. For example, teachers come to understand that copies of the “I Can” statements should not only be posted on classroom walls but also placed in students’ portfolios. This is also the case with rubrics, which teachers can rewrite in student-friendly language for students to use in self-assessment and teacher-designed student reflection sheets.

Once students are involved in self-assessment, they can also engage in goal setting, with their goals based on the parts of rubrics they are unable to meet. For example, first-grade teachers at one school established a benchmark indicating that students would produce a piece of writing with an identifiable beginning, middle, and end. Many students were able to write a good beginning before they learned how to produce an effective middle or ending to their narratives. Based on the results of self-assessments of their writing, the students came to understand that their next goal was to better develop the middle and end of their drafts.

Teachers taught students how to prepare for three-way or student-led conferences with their parents by following procedures outlined by Wong-Kam, Kimura, Sumida, Ahuna-Ka’ai’ai, and Maeshiro (2001). Such conferences were well received by parents. At all schools, teachers discovered that parents became quite well versed in expectations for their children, due to the jargon-free wording of the “I Can” statements and the clarity of the rubrics. These understandings enabled parents to support their children’s progress more effectively than in the past. Thus, the end result of the fourth course is to expand the learning community beyond teachers to encompass students and their parents.

## Connections to a Master’s Degree in Literacy Program

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Clearly, our approach to whole-school reform requires knowledgeable staff members who can work collaboratively to construct the systems foundational to the SBC Process. Also critical is the ability to differentiate literacy instruction in strategic ways so that all students can achieve appropriate end-of-year targets. In Chicago, we learned through the first two years of implementing the SBC Process in eight K–8 and two K–5 schools that success requires more than leadership from key adminis-

trative leaders and a school-based curriculum or literacy coordinator. It also demands a core group of teachers willing to both buy into the process and take the steps necessary to acquire literacy content knowledge and grade-level leadership skills. Moreover, CPS recognized that this kind of leadership—by teachers and curriculum/literacy coordinators—was necessary for district improvement on a wide scale. Consistent with national trends, CPS leaders began to encourage and provide funds for district teachers to work toward highly qualified status. In Illinois, that meant certification as a reading specialist or becoming endorsed as a reading teacher. The Partnership READ Fellows Program was born in response to these needs and trends.

Since 2004, there have been three, 30-member cohorts (2004–2005, 2005–2006, 2006–2007) of Partnership READ fellows. Most have been CPS classroom teachers, although a few literacy coordinators have participated in the program as well. Because the basis of the SBC Process is a collaborative construction of curriculum, assessment, and research-based instructional practices, we created a virtual school—the Partnership READ Fellows Academy—within each cohort. Each Academy includes representatives from grades K–8, and a UIC faculty member serves as “principal.” Over the course of the year, fellows work together in “whole-school” meetings and in leadership and grade-level teams, paralleling the activities that occur in their own schools and learning the leadership skills needed to promote active teacher participation and ownership in each of these settings. At the end of the program, the fellows leave with competencies in literacy teaching, learning, and assessment, as well as the ability to participate in and guide the construction of their own school’s literacy staircase curriculum.

The Partnership READ Fellows Program consists of 12 credits (three courses) of advanced graduate study in literacy education. Approximately one-third of the fellows go on to apply for admission to the UIC master’s degree program in literacy, language, and culture (LLC), applying their 12 credits to the 39 required for specialization or endorsement. Two of the three courses parallel those in the MEd program but are tailored to teachers involved in the SBC Process in their schools; the third is one of the regularly scheduled MEd courses in the LLC program.

The first course, Advanced Methods of Literacy Instruction, is a one-semester course that is framed in terms of the Chicago Reading Initiative, which emphasizes four topics in literacy instruction: comprehension, writing, word study, and fluency. Thus, the course is structured with 3–4 week “units” on each of these topics, followed by synthesis

work (e.g., lesson sets) that brings the individual topics together. Each unit draws on a professional text that would be appropriate for use in school-based teacher study groups or as a curriculum planning resource, such as one of the following:

- *Strategies That Work* (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000)
- *QAR Now* (Raphael, Highfield, & Au, 2006)
- *Assessment and Instruction of Reading and Writing Difficulties* (Lipson & Wixson, 2008)
- *Words Their Way* (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2007)
- *The Fluent Reader* (Rasinski, 2003)
- *Teaching Writing: Balancing Process and Product* (Tompkins, 2007)
- *Writing Workshop: The Essential Guide* (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001)

The Partnership READ Fellows Program website, [oce.uic.edu/oce/ocepublic/programs/DisplayProgram.asp?ProgramID=48](http://oce.uic.edu/oce/ocepublic/programs/DisplayProgram.asp?ProgramID=48), provides additional course information.

The second course, Seminar on Literacy Teacher Leadership, meets one day a month during the school year (i.e., two semesters). While the district covers tuition, each school pays for a substitute teacher for its fellow. In the course, fellows master the leadership skills and strategies they need to effectively share what they learn in their advanced methods course work with their colleagues through grade-level team meetings and inschool professional development coplanned with their school's literacy coordinator. They also work within grade-level teams to construct curriculum guides that they can take back to their schools to serve as examples and models of exemplary staircase curriculum guides.

The third course each fellow takes is selected from among those offered in the LLC master's degree program. Selection is based on factors such as whether a fellow is planning to apply to the program, areas of greatest need, and course availability.

Over the course of the year of their targeted work in the program, fellows experience a range of contexts that develop professional leadership in literacy:

- Participating in the course work
- Creating and delivering an informal presentation on effective instruction of a comprehension strategy within a writing genre to

other fellows in their cohort, using a PowerPoint presentation and related materials

- Presenting formally at a fellows-organized and fellows-run winter strategy conference within a poster fair model
- Collaborating with grade-level colleagues to create a lesson set designed to integrate literacy content areas in the teaching of a small text set
- Participating as a faculty member in the SBC Process to create a vision statement describing the excellent reader or writer who graduates from the school; identify grade-level, end-of-year targets; develop relevant assessment systems; and align instructional activities with anticipated needs of students
- Creating a grade-level specific literacy curriculum guide

Occasionally, the literacy coordinators from the fellows' schools were asked to attend the monthly seminars—occasions the fellows said enhanced communication within their schools and their ability to support the literacy coordinators in their work. With each new cohort, principals of the Partnership READ participating schools became increasingly strategic in nominating fellows, using criteria that included a teacher's commitment to staying in the school at least three years, his or her relationship to other teachers in the school, his or her leadership potential, and the grade level taught (i.e., using fellows to help jump-start grade-level teams in need of additional support). In short, the Partnership READ Fellows Program created a support system wherein the university's master's program became a vehicle for providing high-quality professional development in literacy education to Partnership READ schools. In return, university faculty received feedback from the fellows that could be used to ensure that graduate course work remained highly relevant to those teaching in the urban setting.

While space does not permit a detailed discussion of the implications for preservice teacher education programs, the principles and procedures are much the same as at the graduate level. SBC Process ideas can just as easily be embedded in undergraduate language arts methods courses. Preservice teachers take on the roles of faculty members of a virtual school, working their way through the SBC Process To-Do List. At the University of Hawaii, Au (2002) found this approach to be particularly effective if preservice teachers' field placements were in schools where teachers were working with the SBC Process.

## Summary of Main Ideas

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We suggest that collaborations between universities and urban schools be grounded in the shared goal of improving students' literacy achievement. The SBC Process we have used to structure our teacher education efforts in urban schools was developed with schools in Hawaii in 1997 and then scaled up in 2002 to use with schools in Chicago through a partnership with UIC. Schools in the project seek to improve students' literacy achievement by moving through the SBC Process's seven-level developmental model of change.

Teacher education in the form of courses conducted at participating schools is the primary vehicle we use to help schools progress through the levels in the developmental model. The courses, which are taught in order and build on the content of earlier courses, present teachers with increasingly challenging tasks related to improving students' literacy achievement through standards-based education.

The first course centers on the SBC Process To-Do List, which consists of nine items teachers must put in place to implement a rudimentary system for boosting achievement. Simultaneously, the teachers come together to form a schoolwide professional learning community. The second course requires teachers to take a close look at student learning for the purpose of creating what we call a staircase curriculum. During this course, teachers learn to establish a system of three-times-per-year reporting of assessment results, tracking students' progress toward meeting important end-of-year outcomes in literacy. The third course focuses on curriculum guides, and the fourth on portfolio assessment. In the process of preparing their portfolios, students engage in self-assessment, work with "I Can" statements and student-friendly rubrics, and participate in three-way conferences with their parents and teachers. Thus, at this highest level of the SBC Process developmental model, the learning community expands to encompass students and their parents as well as teachers.

Finally, UIC's Partnership READ Fellows Program supplements the four school-based courses in the SBC Process and is linked to the UIC master's degree program in literacy. The fellows receive instruction in the change process, literacy curriculum, instruction, assessment, and facilitation and leadership skills in the context of graduate-level courses tailored to address urban education. In return, the fellows program supports schools moving through the SBC Process developmental model by providing them with highly knowledgeable teacher leaders.

## Implications for Research, Practice, and Policy

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In discussing implications of our work on urban teacher education within the framework of the SBC Process, we recall the social constructivist themes introduced earlier:

- The social nature of learning and the importance of the school-wide professional learning community
- The embodied nature of experience and the importance of teachers' work on curriculum, instruction, and assessment being embedded within the context of their own schools, grade levels, and classrooms
- Ownership and motivational factors and the importance of teachers seeing themselves—and being seen by others—as creators rather than receivers of curriculum
- The zone of proximal development and the importance of a teacher education curriculum based on a developmental model of school change

We have shown in this chapter how these principles were applied to the design of teacher education courses within long-term school change efforts supported by systematic professional development as the means to help urban schools raise students' literacy achievement.

Our stance is that research, practice, and policy must be undertaken as a coordinated enterprise in urban school districts, where teachers face tremendous challenges in improving literacy achievement. In the case of our work with the SBC Process, research led us to identify seven levels of development through which schools passed as they became successful in raising literacy achievement. We are now able to apply this developmental model as a road map to guide other schools toward success. The four on-site teacher education courses we described provide teachers working in urban schools with the kind of professional learning experiences appropriate to the level their school has reached on the developmental model.

Research thus shapes practice—both our practice as teacher educators and the practice of the teachers with whom we collaborate in SBC Process schools. As a school reaches each new level in the developmental model, we proceed with teachers to the next course and prepare them to take on new challenges related to strengthening their practice. As

teachers become more knowledgeable about literacy curriculum, assessment, and instruction, they become more effective in fostering literacy learning in the classroom. Soon the effects of schoolwide implementation of the staircase curriculum become evident, and students' literacy achievement rises. School progress is further supported when professional development based in urban schools is supplemented with graduate courses for teacher leaders, as demonstrated in the Partnership READ Fellows Program. Teacher leaders emerge from the program ready to promote change schoolwide and within grade-level teams.

The policy implications of our work on teacher education in urban settings are clear. If we are to raise the literacy achievement of students in urban schools, we must have a policy environment that treats teachers as creators—not just receivers—of curriculum. If the goal is to improve students' literacy achievement, especially in areas involving higher-level thinking, policymakers should emphasize systematic professional development related to the improvement of literacy curricula, instruction, and assessment. They should avoid imposing packaged programs on schools and reducing professional development to the kind of “training” needed to implement such programs. We urge policymakers to focus less on specifying which program a school uses and more on professional development that helps teachers to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of programs already in place and to build the strongest literacy curriculum they can.

Often, federal, state, and district mandates narrowly focused on specific literacy or assessment programs make it difficult for schools to stay the course with multiyear school change efforts such as the SBC Process. Mandates that threaten to derail long-term school change efforts should be avoided, and care should be taken not to impose incompatible external initiatives on urban schools that are beginning to show success in improving student achievement.

Few efforts are more critical to the future of the United States than making sure all students—including those in urban school districts—reach the high levels of literacy vital to participation as citizens in a democratic society faced with meeting the demands of globalization. Our repeated observation in urban schools is that success is fragile, while failure is robust. We must renew our efforts to reverse this unfortunate situation. Empowering urban teachers to be creators of literacy curricula, through on-site and graduate courses such as those described in this chapter, will enable them to teach their students to use literacy in thoughtful, constructive, and insightful ways. Long-term professional



development efforts—in which teacher educators partner with urban schools—offer a promising avenue toward the accomplishment of this ambitious goal.

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